

funding, Leave No Child Left Behind. I am not cutting the student loan rates in half, which we have already passed in our Six in '06 budget. But in the Republican Congress, those States had the balance. Here, under the 109th, under the Republican Congress, they could continue to raise that foreign-held debt that I talked about. They could just say, well, let's just put it on a credit card and leave it for the next generation and this generation to pay for it. But we decided here, in the Democratic leadership and society, that we are going to move in a responsible way and not leaning on the backs of our children and our families that exist now as we compete against other countries, not only in the area of technology, but also in the area of financial strength.

And I think that the posture that we are in now, Mr. Speaker, of what I showed on that chart on foreign-held debt, this chart illustrates the posture that we are in right now: \$1.19 trillion. And these are not my numbers; these are the numbers from the U.S. Treasury. So this is not something that I sat down my staff and said, Let's see what looks good or sounds good, because we know as the 30-something Working Group that I would like to add my colleague here Mr. HASTINGS that I am a part of the "something" of the 30-something. But I think it is important for us to point at that and take note to it.

Now, if you are a conservative Democrat, Republican, Independent, you have to have issue with fiscal irresponsibility. If you are someone that feels very strongly as it relates to the supporting of the troops, I think it is important that you pay very close attention to the amount of money that is being spent in Iraq with the lack of accountability, only now that the Congress started holding hearings under the Democratic-controlled House, holding hearings to check the issues and the questions of the no-bid contracts, the lack of oversight over the years. There are a number of things that are coming to light now, Mr. Speaker, because the committees are having committee hearings, subcommittees are having hearings asking the tough questions, let's just say questions in general about the war in Iraq.

I don't want to be in a position, Mr. Speaker, to say, I told you so. I want to be in the position to say that we were able to prevent the taxpayer dollar from being spent in an irresponsible way. There are a number of things that have taken place. I am looking forward, Mr. Speaker and Members, going to Iraq in the next 6 weeks prior to the September 15 report to bring about my own assessment of what is going on there on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, I went in my district to the Federal Reserve Unit of the Combat Engineer Unit 841 that is actually being deployed into Iraq and will be there at the time that I visit Iraq. My talk with them, Mr. Speaker, was that

I hope that this would be their last deployment to Iraq, and something that we need to hold close to us.

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And now, Mr. Speaker, I want to point this out because when I talk about a bipartisan approach, I want to make sure that we talk fact not fiction here on the floor, and I don't want in any way to paint some sort of butter-scotch cloud world.

But I think it's important that we take issue with the fact that this House and the Senate passed legislation that had benchmarks in it, legislation that had redeployment dates in it, legislation that had an end date for combat troops to patrol the streets of Iraq and other areas, and leaving that responsibility up to the Iraqi Government.

I'm mentioning combat troops because I think it's important that we pay very close attention to it. Right now, as we speak, Mr. Speaker, there are troops right now, marines, soldiers, other branches of the armed services that are going through door-to-door checks, not only in Baghdad but throughout Iraq on behalf of the safety of the people of those towns or province or what have you.

And every door we kick in, Mr. Speaker, because, as you hear, the President doesn't speak of coalition anymore because the coalition is gone. The coalition, in their own way, as small as the coalition was, found a way to start redeploying their troops out of combat into the periphery that we speak of so much to provide support where their troops will not be in harm's way, where their money commitment will not be at the level of our money commitment of the numbers that I called off a little earlier. And I think that is very, very important for us to pay very close attention to that.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that when this House acted, and we passed legislation, and the Senate acted and they passed legislation in a bipartisan way, before that bill could even get bound to take to the White House, the President called some of our Republican colleagues down to the White House. They had a lunch and they came out of the White House. And it's not one Democrat in this picture here, and said that we're going to make sure that the President is able to withstand an override of his veto by the Congress.

Now, I'm not judging Members for going down to the White House and saying that. But I just want to make sure, because I believe that a number of Members have gone back to their districts and, you know, I'm not trying to call any names or party affiliation, but I'm just telling you, not one Democrat went down to the White House to stand with the President on his troop escalation plan.

But I think the November election was all about a new direction. And there's a difference between making

sure that the men and women have what they need while they're in harm's way. There's a difference when it comes down to the fact that we here in the Congress have to put forth policy and parameters on the taxpayer dollars to make sure that it's being spent appropriately.

You heard Mr. HASTINGS, who's a member of the Intelligence Committee, also is involved in many of the European talks and is a leader in one of the largest parliamentary councils in Europe that were a part of the coalition that made his statements about what we know and why we're not bringing about the accountability that's needed.

I hold this picture up because I want to discourage Members from going to the White House on behalf of party. And I think it's important that we look at it from that standpoint. As I come in for a closing, Mr. Speaker, as we proceed over the next week and a half, we're going to spend many hours here on this floor. We're going to have a number of amendments. Tomorrow, as we mark up and start to put together the Children's Health Insurance Plan in the Ways and Means Committee, there will be a number of amendments, as we start looking at the Medicaid and Medicare benefits, who's going to get what when and how it's going to happen, there are going to be a number of amendments. And it's nothing wrong with amendments and dialogue and discourse.

But I believe that the issues that we have to tackle as a Congress, we're going to need that Republican bipartisan support, along with this Democratic leadership.

Minimum wage never would have been increased if it wasn't for the leadership of the Speaker and a number of the Democratic Members that held to their guns to make sure that everyday people that punch in and out, Mr. Speaker, while we're here on the floor, those individuals that are bussing tables, those individuals that are cleaning offices, those individuals that are working shift work, as a security officer or as an individual that's trying to provide for their families.

And even for salaried workers, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important when you look at the increase in minimum wage, it helps salaried workers because they'll make more money and they will be able to pay more for health insurance, additional insurance if they're insurance at their job doesn't provide what they need; and it also takes a number of families over the poverty line.

But as we look at this, I think it's important, there's only so many times that Republican Members can go down to the White House and say, Mr. President, I stand with you, versus standing with those individuals that have said that they want something overwhelmingly, like the minimum wage and other areas. We still had Members that voted against the increase in minimum wage, which I can't understand, still today.